K. YEBOA DAAKU

AFRICAN HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHIES

# Osei Tutu of Asante

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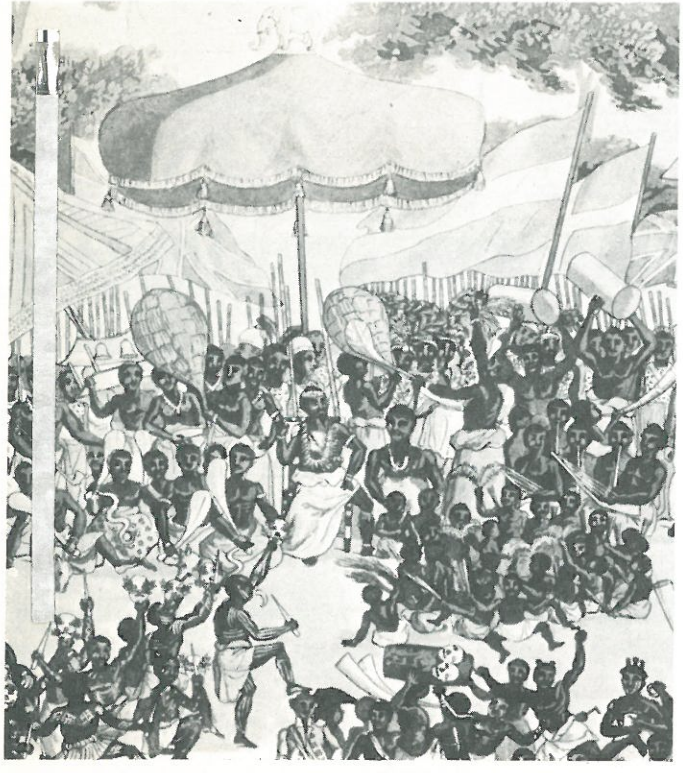

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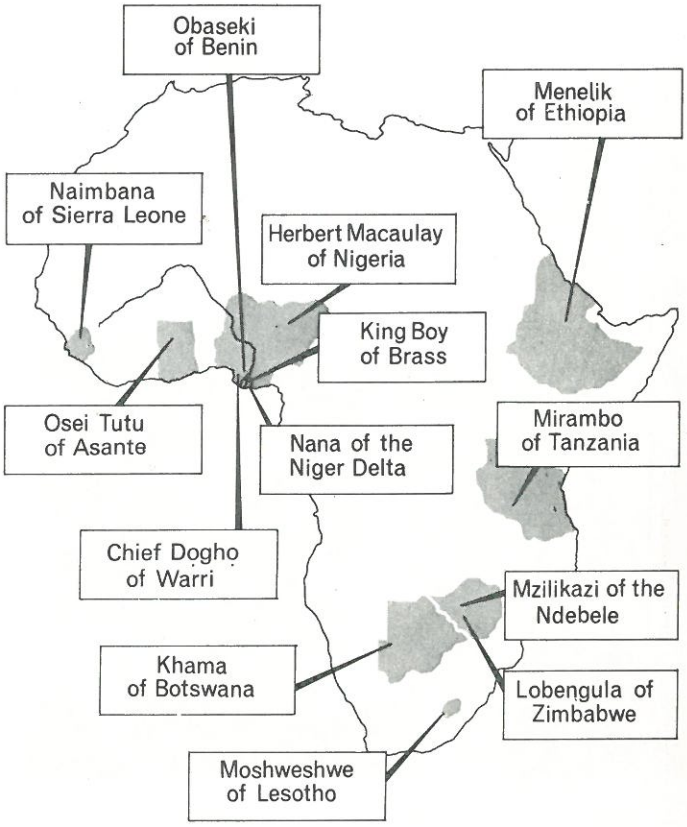

# Osei Tutu of Asante

K. YEBOA DAAKU

*Formerly Lecturer in History, University of Ghana*

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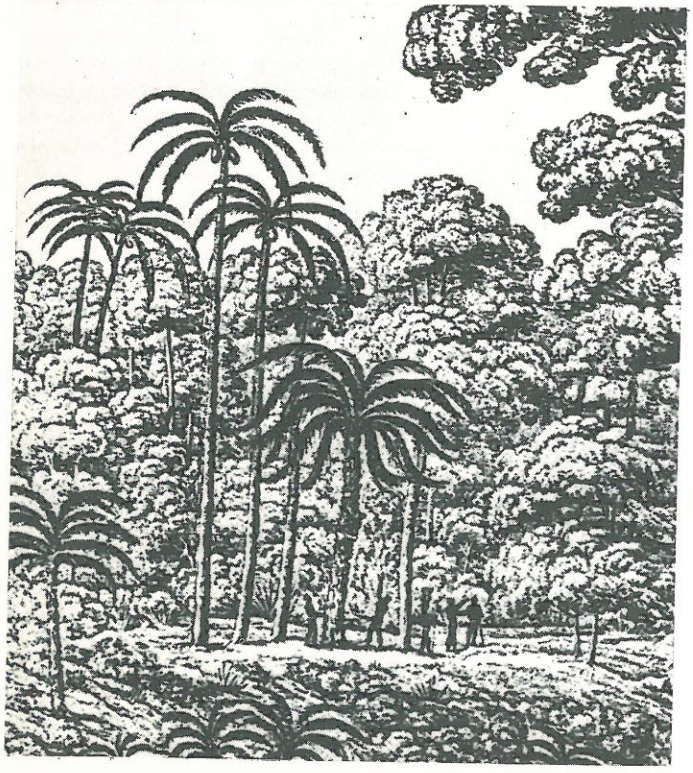

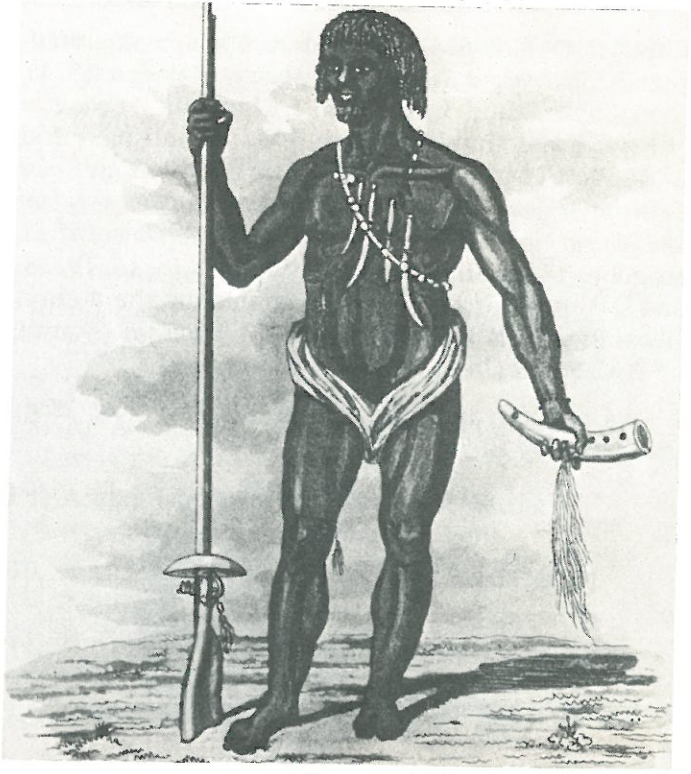

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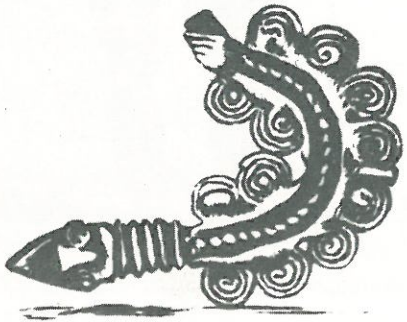

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## PREFACE

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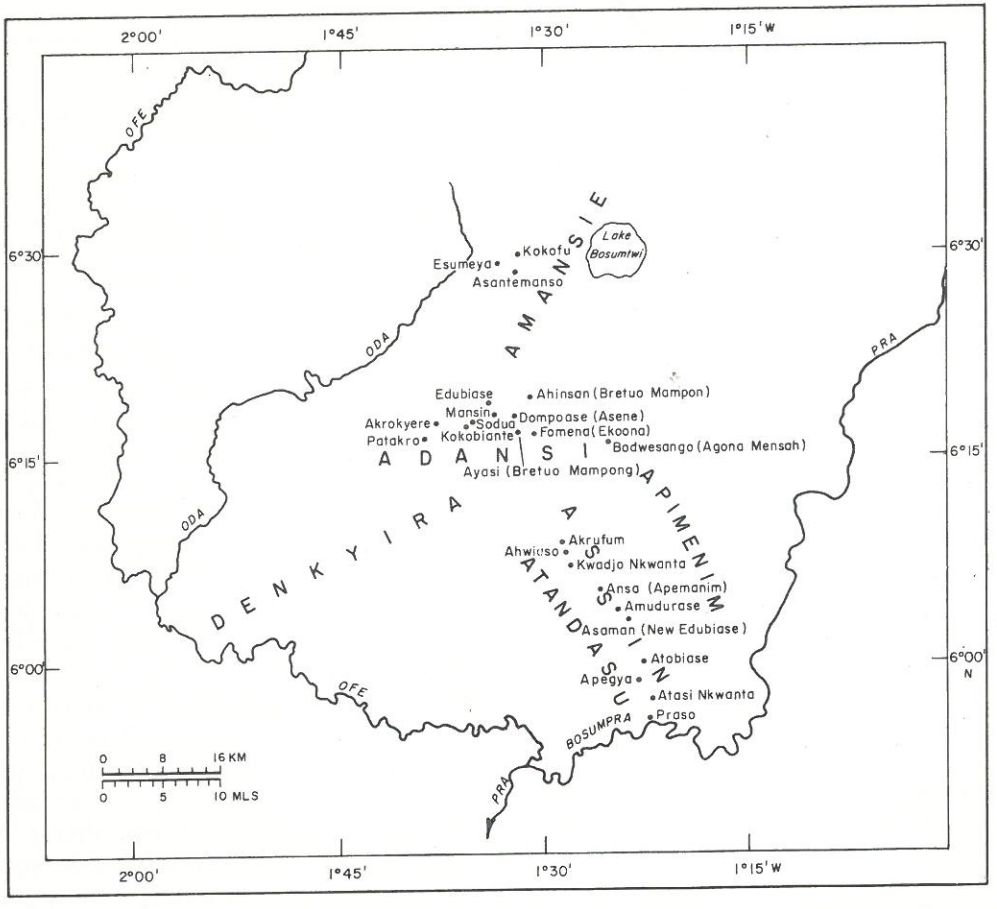
I also thank Dr Phyllis Martin of the African Studies Programme of the Indiana University, Bloomington, for sparing her valuable time to go through the work in the manuscript form and for her suggestions for both factual and stylistic improvements. To Mrs Nancy Klinkinberg of the Oral History Section, Indiana University, for all her secretarial assistance, I offer my sincere thanks. My thanks also go to Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, the Asantehene and Odeefo Boa Amponsem III Denkyira for kindly making their pictures available for the illustrations.

I trust that this short piece will throw light on the activities of one of the most fascinating rulers on whose work the growth and development of the Asante nation came to be based.

K. YEBOA DAAKU

## INTRODUCTION

Of all the Asante kings, none is so well-remembered as Osei Tutu. Because of his wisdom and foresight he has become almost a legendary figure in Asante, the kind of man about whom many wonderful stories are told. It is because of the honour in which he is held that the Asantehene's stool is often referred to as Osei Tutu *Akondwa* (stool) or at times the Osei and Opoku stool. He transformed loose kinship groups into a nation: he gave the nation a constitution and a unity which enabled Asante to last for well over two-and-a-half centuries. He set the pattern for Asante government and started a policy of expansion and consolidation which was to make Asante the strongest and certainly the most famous of the forest states of West Africa. A widely travelled and able ruler, he was prepared to borrow and adapt institutions to help in the creation of a nation. He was open-minded enough to take advice, and he surrounded himself with able and dedicated councillors like Okomfo Anokye. His readiness to lead and determination to succeed earned him the name *Opemsuo*: 'He who Strives'. It is no surprise, then, that all laws and traditions worth remembering are still traced to Osei Tutu.




*Map 1 Adanse: the home of the Akan clans.*

# 1
# Asante before Osei Tutu

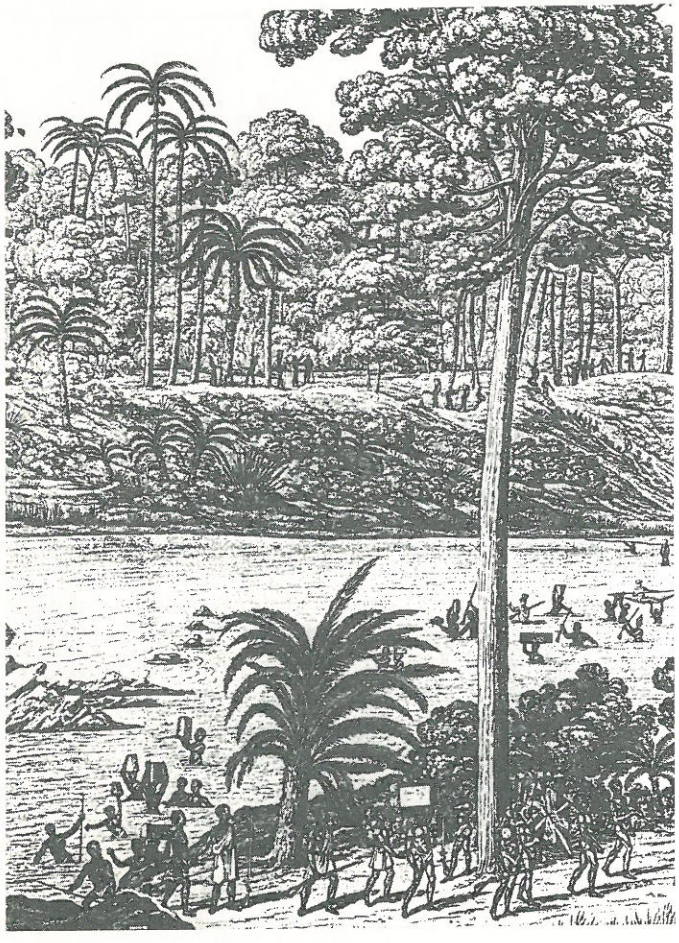
*Obrempon, wofiri Adanse Akrokyere*
*Daammere Odomankoma boo adee.*

Noble Ruler, you hail from Akrokyere in Adanse
Where the Creator created things.

It is not known for certain when the founders of Asante moved into the area around their modern capital, Kumasi. However, it appears that by the end of the sixteenth century there were a number of small Akan groups scattered in the forest region of Ghana. To the north there had grown up the powerful state of Bono-Manso, in the rich gold and kola-nut area in the north-west. The rise of the state was a response to the demand for these articles – gold and kola nuts – in the kingdoms of the Niger Bend, especially Mali. However, to the south and south-east of Bono-Manso there were many small Akan groups. They were concentrated mainly in the area of modern Adanse, also known for gold-mining. This was a well-watered region with three important rivers – Oda, Ofin and Pra.

The Akan now live in the forest region of modern Ghana in the area west of the Volta and south of the Black Volta. Their language is a branch of the Kwa group. Their basic social organization is the family, which is grouped around eight principal clans – Aduana, Agona, Asakyiri, Asenee, Asona, Bretuo, Ekoona and Oyoko, with their subdivisions. Members who belong to the same clan are prohibited by custom to marry because they consider themselves to be brothers and sisters. Descent and inheritance are traced through the female line. The symbol of authority of the Akan chief is the stool.

Akan traditions say that it was in modern Adanse that God first began the creation of the world. This area was the home of the founders of the five principal Akan states – Adanse, Akyem, Assin, Denkyira and Asante. The Akan political and social organizations were developed in the Adanse region. It is interesting that almost all members of the eight principal Akan clans still point to old sites in Adanse as places where their ancestors formerly stayed. The importance of Adanse in Akan history is best illustrated by the drum music of many of the chiefs. On great festive occasions the talking drums give this message, among others: *Odomankoma boo ade, Bore bore boo ade, oboo Adanse Akrokyere kan kyerekyere,* meaning, 'When the Creator created things, when the manifold Creator created things, he first created Adanse Akorokyere.' Until the seventeenth century, the Akan

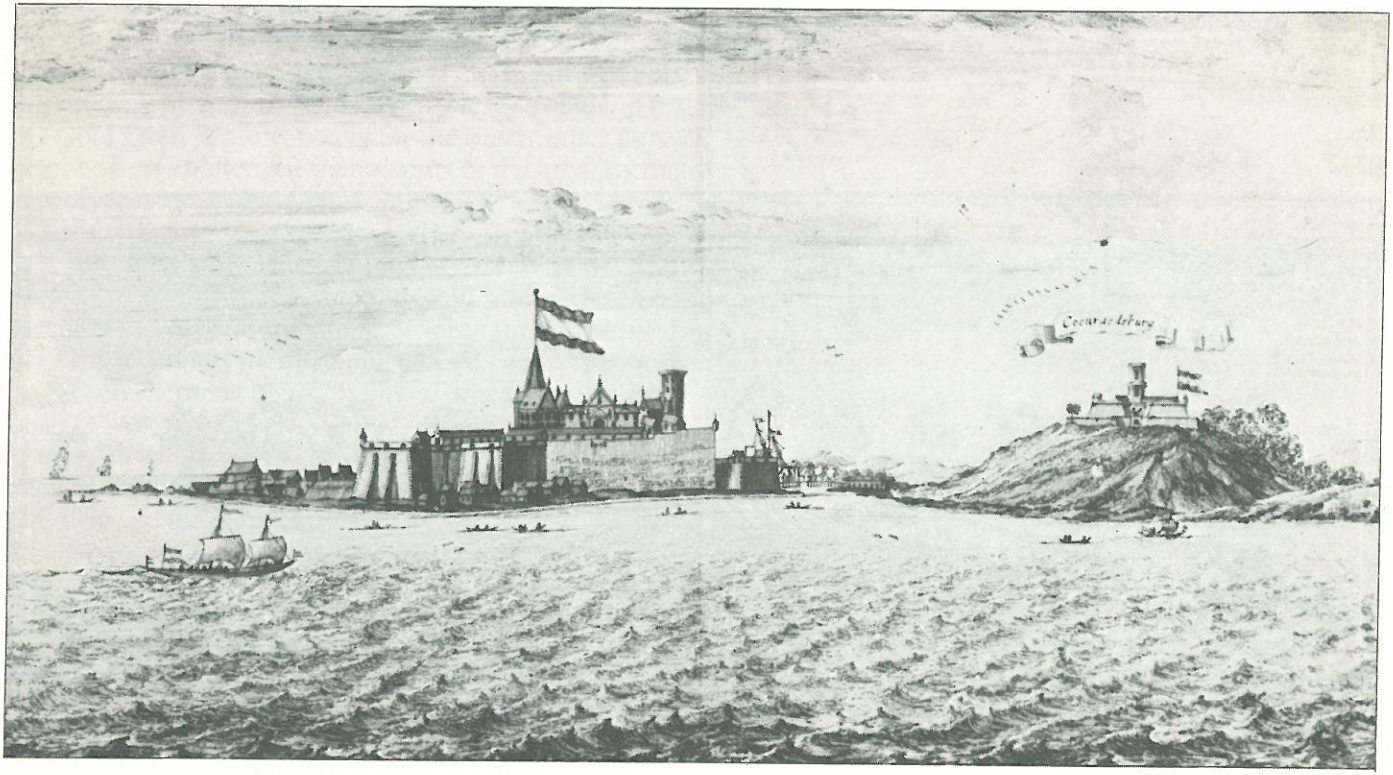


*1 The River Pra, from the south.*

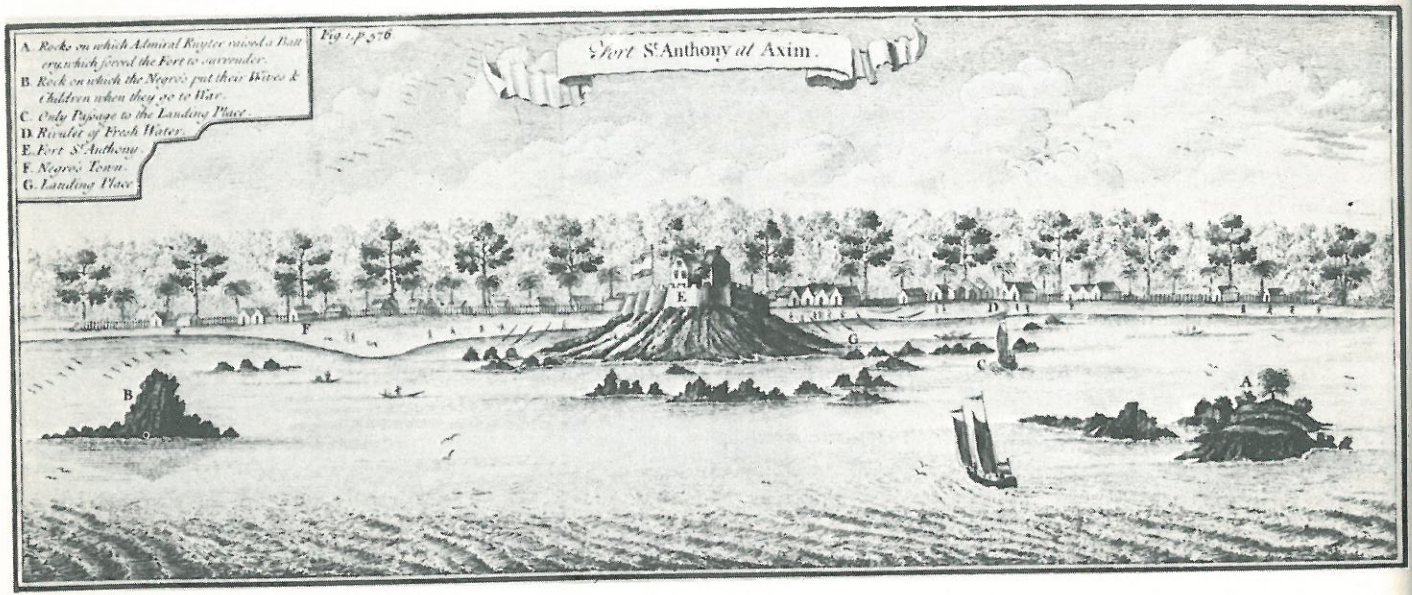
states in Adanse seem to have been organized around independent clan leaders. The only bond of unity was the worship of the principal god, Bona. In times of danger, however, the people normally looked upon the most powerful and courageous of the clan heads as their leader. The most famous was Ewurade Basa of the Asenee clan, who unsuccessfully tried to unite the various clans under his rule some time in the sixteenth century. At best the political system of Adanse in the early years may be described as a loose confederacy of clan states. Although there were disputes, it appears that people were ready to submit to arbitration and the wishes of their traditional gods. In the seventeenth century, however, developments both inside and outside West Africa changed peoples' ideas on how to govern themselves and control others.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese had set up their trading post on the coast of Ghana. They built Elmina Castle in 1482 to safeguard themselves and their trade. The Akan were able to begin an extensive trade in gold with these Europeans. By the end of the sixteenth century the Portuguese commercial monopoly on the Guinea coast in general and on the Gold Coast in particular was being effectively challenged by other European

*2 Elmina Castle (named Sao Jorge d'Mine by the Portuguese).*

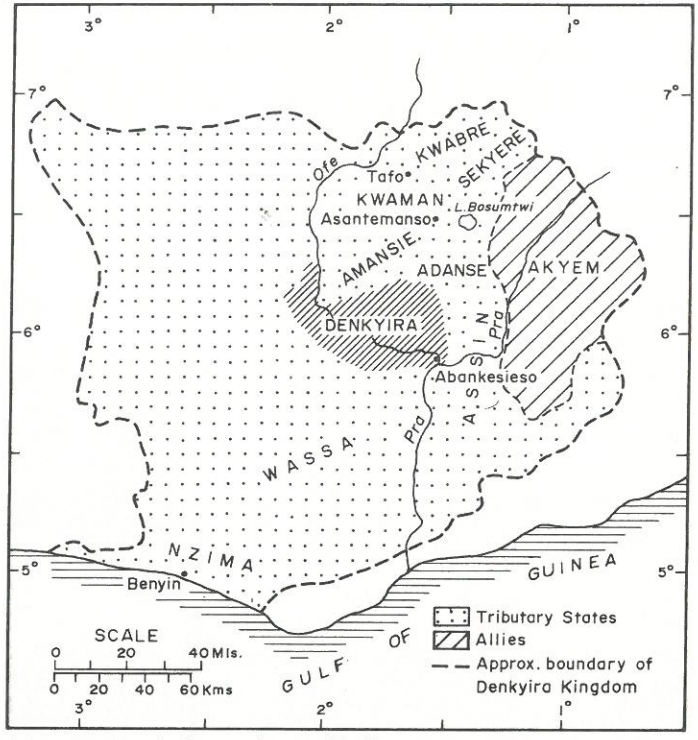


3 *Fort St Anthony of Axim.*


A. Rocks on which Admiral Rayter raised a Batt-ery, which forced the Fort to surrender.
B. Rock on which the Negroes put their Wives & Children when they go to War.
C. Only Passage to the Landing Place.
D. Rivulet of Fresh Water.
E. Fort St Anthony.
F. Negroes Town.
G. Landing Place.
Fig. 1. p. 576.
Fort St Anthony at Axim.
A
B
C
D
E
F
G

trading nations like the Dutch, the English, and the French. In 1637 the Dutch took Elmina Castle from the Portuguese. Five years later in 1642 they captured Fort St Anthony at Axim, the last Portuguese stronghold on the Gold Coast. Unfortunately for the Dutch, other European powers challenged their claims in the area. By the end of the seventeenth century, European nations such as Denmark, Sweden, England, and Brandenburg Prussia had built forts and castles on the Gold Coast in an effort to gain a share of the trade in gold and slaves. The presence of a large number of European traders allowed Africans to import many manufactured goods. The most important of these items, as far as the state was concerned, were firearms.

How did the European presence affect the African peoples of Ghana in general and Asante in particular? The demand for many African products, especially gold and slaves, meant that those African peoples, especially the chiefs who wanted the new goods, had to extend the limits of their territory to gain control over more sources of wealth. With the introduction of quantities of firearms, it became easier for those who obtained the weapons to gain control of their less fortunate neighbours. The readiness to fight and the desire to acquire more




*Map 2 Denkyira: sphere of influence c. 1700.*

*4 An Asante chief equipped for war in the nineteenth century.*

wealth began to change people's ideas about the methods of state organization. In effect, the interest of the state began to be considered more important than those of the individual. It is significant that both the stories of the Akan and the records of the European trading companies dealing with the seventeenth century refer to frequent wars among the people of Ghana. It was during this period that the Agona clan rose into prominence in the Adanse region, defeated all her neighbours in and around Adanse, and set up the powerful kingdom of Denkyira.

From the middle of the seventeenth century many of the Akan who refused Denkyira rule moved away from Adanse and scattered into the forest area. Even before the rise of Denkyira, small groups of Akans had moved to settle in other parts of the country, especially in the kola-producing district of north-eastern Asante. Already there were parties of the Ekoona, Aduana and Asenee clans settled in the Kwaman area, where Kumasi was later to be founded. It was the rise of Denkyira, however, which led several large groups, including the Oyoko and Bretuo to emigrate into modern Asante. The Oyoko people moved into the Asantemanso area, near modern Kokofu. There they reorganized the scattered states north of Adanse into a powerful nation state which later became known as Asante. From Asantemanso the immediate ancestors of Osei Tutu started moving north into the Kwaman region.

Tradition has it that there were three rulers before Obiri Yeboa, the maternal grand-uncle and the immediate predecessor of Osei Tutu. It is not clear whether the first two rulers, Twum-Antwi and Kwabia Amanfi, were of the Oyoko clan. Though the Akan trace descent through the maternal line, it sometimes happens that sons succeed their fathers when there are no direct descendants of the mother.

It was the ruler Oti Akenten who embarked on an aggressive policy to win power from the hands of the pre-Asante states in Kwaman. It is sometimes said that the pre-Asante settlers gave him this name as a nickname. They called him Oti, *'a wagye oman akenten so'*, that is: Oti, the one who 'has spread himself over all the land'. Not much is known about the activities of the predecessors of Osei Tutu, however, although there is no doubt that the foundations on which Osei Tutu was later to build were laid by Oti Akenten and Obiri Yeboa.

Obiri Yeboa probably came to the Oyoko stool at the beginning of the 1660s, and is often referred to as *Odi*

*Ahenkan*, the first of the kings. He saw the need to take strong action against the early settlers. He saw that by extending the borders of his state he could bring in many of the kola-nut producing areas, and also gain control over the important trade route to the Mande trading town of Begho. Such a policy however risked war with the neighbouring states that disputed his claim, above all with Denkyira, who was his overlord. So he sent his grand-nephew, Osei Tutu, to serve the Denkyirahene, Boa Amponsem. This act had a twofold purpose. With a leading member of the royal family, who was also a likely successor to the Oyoko stool, a political hostage at its court, Denkyira was assured of the good behaviour of the northern state. Moreover, the young Osei Tutu would learn about Denkyira institutions and culture during his period of political apprenticeship. These he could put to good use in the future when it was his turn to rule.

At the time of Obiri Yeboa there were also very important political developments in the neighbourhood of Kwaman. The states that were later to come together as Asante were all gradually being established in the area. The most numerous clan-group were the Oyoko, who spread out from Asantemanso in all directions. In the north-east the states of Dwaben and Nsuta were founded.

5 *An Asante foot-soldier.*

Side by side with the Oyoko, new states were being established by members of other clans. The Aduana were to the north-east of Nsuta at Kumawu. One branch of the Aduana remained at Asumenya in Asantemanso. Not far from Kwaman, and in closer association with Obiri Yeboa, was a branch of the Bretuo under Adu Gyamfi of Wonoo, who had virtually become the unenstooled king of Kwabre. The main Bretuo group was, however, settled in the Sekyere area, around Mampong Akrofroso.

These states were in no way politically united. But the Oyoko, coming as they did from one single clan, regarded themselves as of one family, and this bond of kinship was to bring them together when the need arose. Each of the groups of settlers began on its own to extend its territory at the expense of the Guan under Atara Finam. In the Kwaman area the most formidable group that threatened the Oyoko were the people of Amakom and Tafo, who owned most of the land to the east and north, as well as the people of Kaase to the south-east, and the Doma of Suntreso to the west. Through wars, diplomatic marriages and persuasion, Oti Akenten and Obiri Yeboa started a policy of conquest and incorporation. Those who readily submitted were assimilated into the new state and some were even absorbed into the Oyoko clan.

It was during one of these wars with the Doma, at Suntreso, that Obiri Yeboa lost his life some time in the 1680s. With Osei Tutu away from Kwaman anything could have happened to the new state. But it survived. A wise ruler with plenty of foresight, Obiri Yeboa had pursued a policy that made him popular with his people as well as those of surrounding clans. Conscious of the need for united action against the Bono and Guan inhabitants, he sought the alliance and friendship of members of other clans. He created posts for those outside his clan and allowed the people he appointed to have some freedom of action in spheres where their ambitions did not directly conflict with his. Defeated chiefs who were willing to come under his rule were given posts at court, and shared in the administration of the state. The success of his policy was shown when the new state survived and grew into a nation, in spite of his untimely death in war.

Adu Gyamfi of Wonoo, the Gyaasehene* and regent, sent for Osei Tutu, who had escaped from Denkyira to Akwamu, to take up his uncle's sword and office. With the reign of Osei Tutu the history of modern Asante began.

*Gyaasehene is the head of the king's household.

# 2
# The Early Years

*Amakom Akosa Mantam,*
*Nana, bre me kyem nkogye akofena*
*Osei Tutu na yede n'akofena regye no taataa.*

Akosa Mantam of Amakom
Grandsire, please give me a shield to demand a sword.
It is Osei Tutu who is being taught to walk with the sword.

For the Akan, who trace descent and inheritance through the female line, it is considered a great tragedy for a woman to be barren. If there are no children, the lineage will soon be extinct. For a royal house to be faced with such a plight is a grave tragedy indeed. If a ruler's sisters or sisters' daughters have no sons, the chances are that the stool will go to another lineage, which may not be directly connected with the royal line. In such a situation the chief's sons might inherit and 'take care' of the stool until a direct male heir was born to the ruling clan, but this could create difficulties. Sometimes the stool remained with the family of the caretakers. Or the family adopted people of slave origin into the clan and thereby perpetuated the line. But all efforts were made to have direct male descendants, of royal blood. In most cases the traditional gods were consulted and their help sought to make the women fertile. When such prayers were favourably answered it was no unusual for the child to be named after these gods in appreciation of their help.

One of the most critical problems facing Obiri Yeboa the grand-uncle of Osei Tutu, was the question of his successor. He had no direct brothers and only one grand niece, Manu Kotosii, who was childless, so it looked as he would not get a direct successor to carry on his work. The local deities and oracles were consulted but were unable to grant the king's request. So Obiri Yeboa sent Manu Kotosii to the Otutu deity in Akwapim, which was then under the powerful Akwamu state. Fortunately for all concerned she was blessed with a son some time in the 1660s. This son was named Osei : and for the greater honour of the deity the child was also given the name Tutu.

A young member of the royal family was expected to possess bravery and skill in war. But this alone was not enough. It was essential to know much about the many problems of running and maintaining an Akan court. A great deal of this could best be learnt at the courts of powerful and famous rulers. By the 1660s Denkyira was the overlord of most of the Akan states, including the Kumasi and Sekyere areas of modern Asante. Indeed

Denkyira was by far the most powerful, wealthy and well-organized Akan state. It succeeded in bringing almost all the gold-bearing regions under its rule. Popularly known as *Menesono*, 'one who swallows elephants', the Denkyira kings received regular tributes from their subject states. And to keep these states under constant subjection and discourage them from rising against her, Denkyira made it a policy to request that sons or grandsons of the sisters of the important chiefs be sent to the capital at Abankesieso. In the service of Denkyira, the royal hostages were at the same time taught how kings should rule and behave. And it is highly probable that the youthful Osei Tutu was greatly influenced in his later life by Denkyira institutions.

The Denkyira state had already won the respect of the European traders at the coast. These dispatched regular delegations with presents to Boa Amponsem, the most famous and powerful of all the kings, to encourage him to send trade to their forts and castles. It is interesting to note that Denkyira, unlike other Akan states, had already adopted some sacred objects which served to unify the whole state. The *Abankamdwa*, the state stool, was said to have been made of precious beads instead of wood. This, together with other objects like the *Sasatia*, the special executioner's sword, helped to create a kind of mystery around the Denkyira monarchy. At Boa Amponsem's court all kinds of craftsmen, drummers and musicians were patronized. They helped to heighten the power and prestige of the king. Denkyira was also famous for the many gold ornaments which the kings caused to be made for them. The army was equipped with European firearms and had become invincible in war. There was a regular trade not only with Europeans on the coast, but with the Mande and Begho and other northern markets. In short, the state was at its highest peak of fame. No wonder that numerous praise names and praise poems were composed for the king. Boa Amponsem was described as *odi sika atomprada*, meaning 'one who uses only the freshly mined gold'. His drummers sounded out such phrases as *Kotoko Som Amponsem* meaning 'the Porcupine [which became the emblem of Asante], is subject of Amponsem'. Men like the famous priest Okomfo Anokye also helped to increase the fame of Denkyira. Indeed, it is said that it was at Abankesieso that Osei Tutu first met Okomfo Anokye, who became his lifelong friend and constitutional adviser.

It is not known for certain when Osei Tutu left Abankesieso. Tradition has it that while in Denkyira he had

a love affair with Bensua, the sister of Boa Amponser
Afraid for his life, and probably on the advice of h
grand-uncle, Obiri Yeboa, and certainly with the he
of Okomfo Anokye, Osei Tutu made his escape
Akwamu. This was another up-and-coming Akan sta
a few miles north of Accra. It may be recalled that it w
the deity Otutu, in Akwamu, who was credited wi
helping Manu Kotosii to give birth to Osei Tutu. It w
therefore logical that in time of trouble the young Os
Tutu would seek and obtain protection in the land of t
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1670s and 1680s Akwamu was extending its power ov
states like Accra, Agona, Akwapim, parts of Akye
Abuakwa, Kwahu, and the lands east of the Volta.
came into very close contact with the Danish, Dutch a
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Akwamuhene was now overlord of Accra, the Europea
paid him dues for the land on which they had built th

*6 Priests of Asante invoking the national deities. Anokye may have introduced this.*

a love affair with Bensua, the sister of Boa Amponser
Afraid for his life, and probably on the advice of h
grand-uncle, Obiri Yeboa, and certainly with the he
of Okomfo Anokye, Osei Tutu made his escape
Akwamu. This was another up-and-coming Akan sta
a few miles north of Accra. It may be recalled that it w
the deity Otutu, in Akwamu, who was credited wi
helping Manu Kotosii to give birth to Osei Tutu. It w
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forts. Here again the Akwamuhene's relations with European traders, especially the ease with which he came by firearms, deeply impressed Osei Tutu. How far south Osei Tutu visited during the period of his stay is still unknown, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that he might even have made a journey to the coast.

In Akwamu Osei Tutu is known to have won the favour of friendship with the Akwamuhene, Ansa Sasaraku. Ansa Sasaraku was no doubt attracted by his personal character and charming manners; but it is not unlikely that he also saw the wide range of political possibilities which Osei Tutu's presence offered him. An alliance with the rising Asante kingdom would offer him an opportunity to withstand any threats from Akyem, Akwamu's traditional enemy. If Akyem were to be engaged on its northern boundaries by the Asantes, this would enable Akwamu to concentrate attention on its policy of expanding to the east of the Volta. Here in Akwamu, Osei Tutu was joined by his friend Okomfo Anokye from Abankesieso in Denkyira.

It was while he was staying in Akwamu in the late 1680s that a delegation from the Gyaasehene Adu Gyamfi, headed by the Antoahene Sakodee Date, arrived to announce the death of his grand-uncle, Obiri Yeboa, and to invite Osei Tutu to return to be enstooled. Escorted by a contingent of Akwamu warriors, which the king had kindly provided for his protection, Osei Tutu arrived in Kwaman in about 1689. Soon afterwards he was enstooled as king. Of all the kings who had ascended the Oyoko stool before him none was better prepared for the office than Osei Tutu. From the two powerful Akan states of Akwamu and Denkyira he had learned much that was to prove useful to him as king. He may have seen something of the strength and weakness of these kingdoms. He had become aware of the need to provide a sound constitution, to ensure that members of the conquered states identified themselves with the conqueror. In both places he had been impressed by the benefits which could be enjoyed by whoever controlled the sources of European firearms. Borrowing from both, he adapted their political, social and economic organizations to the new state of Asante, which he was soon to found. Denkyira and Akwamu may therefore be described as pace-setters for Asante. Osei Tutu was soon followed to Asante by his friend, Okomfo Anokye. The two together were able to lay the foundations of a nation which was to gain in strength until it brought virtually the whole of modern Ghana under its power.

# 3
# The Task Ahead

*Osebenso Adwera;*
*Osei Kumanini Brempon*
*Osei Kronkron*
*Go mu bere bere, go mu bere bere.*

The watery shrub that thrives on hard ground
Noble Osei that lays men low,
Osei, true and of pure blood,
Take it easy, take it easy.

On his enstoolment Osei Tutu quickly realized that he had many problems to solve before a strong and powerful state could be built. In spite of the common bond connecting the later emigrants from Adanse and Asantemanso, they all worked independently of each other. Whatever their spiritual and cultural similarities, there was no binding political force to enable them to work together. Even before the death of Obiri Yeboa, the pre-Asante states were showing every sign of discontent and restlessness because the newcomers were gradually taking away their land and power. The king of Tafo, Osafo Akoto, for instance, was known to have caused his horn-blowers to shout defiantly: 'Get away from here, you, Osei Tutu.' Nor were the Aduana of Kaase prepared in any way to submit tamely to Oyoko rule. Attempts by Oti Akenten and Obiri Yeboa to force Kaase to co under their rule had not been successful. Close by, to t east, was the numerically powerful, if militarily we Asenee settlement at Amakom. There was also the pre ing need to avenge the death of Obiri Yeboa, who h been killed in the war with the Domas.

The greatest problem, however, was how to Asante of Denkyira rule. If Osei Tutu was to build similarly strong and powerful state, then he had to ha free access to the coast; but this he rightly realized wo be possible only after the Denkyira threat had be eliminated. And Denkyira could only be overcome the united action of a united people. The biggest probl then, was how unity could be achieved. Osei Tutu w realistic enough to know that any talk about unity wo only succeed if he occupied a position of strength. It w necessary therefore first to unite the small states arou him under his control. This he was prepared to do force if necessary.

The warlike Kaase people Osei Tutu was able to s due by both diplomacy and force. First marrying i the family of the royal Aduana clan, the king la attacked and defeated the state. His aim was not to br up these powerful groups completely but to weaken a

reduce them to a subordinate status. Their warlike spirit was to be directed for, rather than against, his interests and advantage. In the political organization of his state he placed the Kaasehene in the Gyaase division, with the Gyaasehene as his immediate overlord.

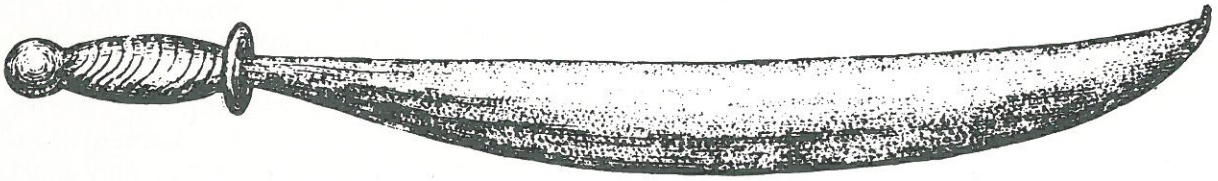
The next important state which was brought under his rule was Amakom. The Asenee of Amakom had arrived in the Kwaman area before the Oyoko and had gradually increased the numbers of their people by the addition of many new immigrants from Adanse and the Asante-Akyem area. Early in his career Osei Tutu defeated Akosa Yiadom of Amakom. Here again he realized that it was better to have this numerically strong group on his side than to estrange them. The weapon he adopted was a dynastic marriage between the two royal houses. Nyako, the daughter of Osei Tutu's sister and the future mother of Opoku Ware, was given in marriage to Adu Panin, the successor of Akosa Yiadom. The Amakomhene now had a stake in the well-being of the Oyoko stool. All things being equal, his son by that marriage would become the next Asantehene, and he would earn for himself the enviable title *Owo ahene*, the begetter of kings.

With Kaase and Amakom as supporters, and the willing cooperation of the fearless Gyaasehene Adu Gyamfi of Wonoo, it was not long before Osei Tutu was to conquer Osafo Akoto of Tafo. Instead of 'getting out of his land', as had been demanded, he moved in on Osafo Akoto and completely routed the Tafo forces. With the fall of Tafo, Osei Tutu was said to have captured several valuable trophies including 'drums and a gold guitar'. Tradition has it that Osei Tutu by that victory won the allegiance of over a hundred towns and villages. Magnanimous in victory, Osei Tutu incorporated Tafo into the new state and gave the ruler the important office of Benkumhene, commander of the left wing of the army.

Strengthened by the new conquests and the policy of incorporation, Osei Tutu was in a position to launch an attack on his formidable enemies, the Domas. Although he had lost his life in the war Obiri Yeboa had succeeded in driving away the Domas from Suntreso to Abesim, a few miles west of Kumasi. Osei Tutu now attacked and routed the Doma at Abesim: the latter fled westward to found the state of Gyaman.

But these home victories, although essential to the growth of a new nation, were not enough. In spite of his success, Osei Tutu felt restrained by the fact that his new state still had to pay tribute to Denkyira. Besides,

there were, within twenty miles radius of his new capital of Kumasi, several newly established independent states. Each state was interested in consolidating its position and setting up its own system of administration. Osei Tutu realized that he must turn them into allies. But how? Fortunately there were a number of common factors which could be exploited to achieve a measure of unity. In the first place all these states, Mampon, Dwaben, Nsuta, Kokofu, Asumenya, were under the overlordship of Denkyira. They all had one overriding desire, rid themselves of Denkyira rule. There was also a mo positive common factor: Kumasi, Dwaben, Bekwa Kokofu and Nsuta had been founded by members of th Oyoko clan. They all considered themselves to belong one family. By diplomacy and a show of goodwill the states could be persuaded to come together; and all th was needed was a clever and fearless leader. This Os Tutu certainly was.



# 4
# Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye

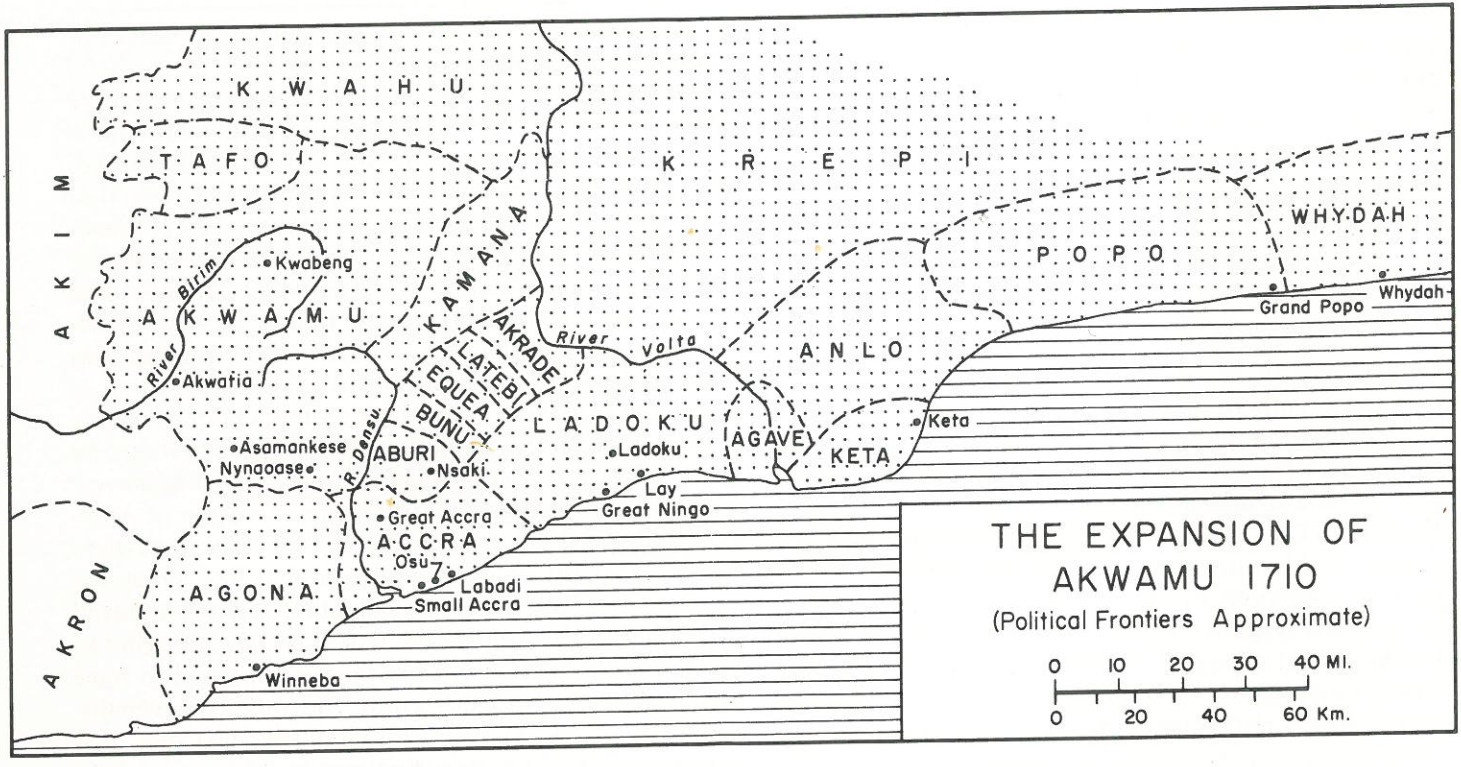
*Anokye Anokye dooso oo!*
*Enye mene Asona Anokyewaa**
*Enye mene Asakyiri Anokyewaa*
*Enye mene Aduana-Abrade Anokyewaa*
*Na mene Anokye Komfo a ne din ahyehye.*

There are many people called Anokye
I do not mean Anokyewaa of the Asona clan
Or Anokyewaa of the Asakyiri clan
Or Anokyewaa of Aduana-Abrade clan.
I mean the renowned Okomfo Anokye.

It was thus in his handling of the Denkyira menace that Osei Tutu had the best opportunity to unite the various states into a new Asante nation. To achieve the best results he worked closely with his lifelong friend and confidant, Kwame Agyei Frimpon, who became known as Okomfo Anokye, the greatest constitutional adviser of his time. If any Akan priest's name has become a household word, it is that of Okomfo Anokye. Although it is known that he stayed and worked in both Denkyira and Akwamu, it was in Asante that Okomfo Anokye's deeds and achievements are still vividly and affectionately remembered. It is a tribute to the wisdom of Osei Tutu that Anokye was given the greatest encouragement to implement his many ideas.

Little is known about exactly when and even where Okomfo Anokye was born. Because of his fame he is claimed as a native by all the states in which he stayed. Denkyira traditions claim that his mother was from that state, and that it was there that he learnt the art of priesthood. Traditions of Awukugua in Akwapim, on the other hand, claim that he was a native of that town and that he was born and bred there. In fact these two traditions do not contradict each other. If the mother was from Denkyira and the father from the Guan town of Awukugua, Anokye could legitimately claim to belong to both places. The Denkyiras are Akans and therefore matrilineal in descent. This fact would make Anokye a true-born Denkyira. Similarly, since the Guan of Awukugua are patrilineal, if Anokye's father came from there he could equally inherit from his father's side. Whatever his true nationality, there is no doubt that Anokye stayed for some time in Awukugua, where people still point to his home and proudly show objects supposed to have been miraculously made by him. The traditions even disagree on where Anokye and Osei Tutu first met. It is sometimes said that they first met in Akwamu, whilst

*Anokyewaa is the Female form of Anokye.




*Map 3 The expansion of Akwamu 1710*

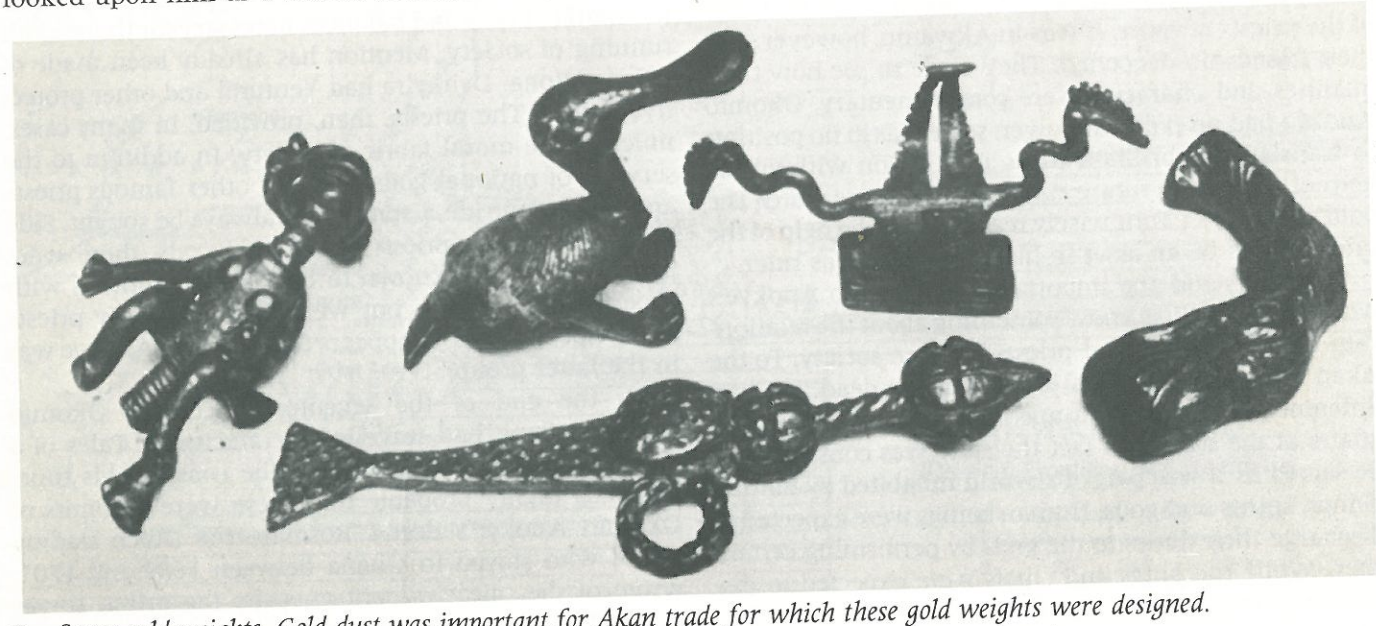
A.H Whydah

another tradition maintains that it was in Denkyira. From the oral traditions of Asante and Denkyira it appears that the latter claim is more likely to be correct. The two may have developed their friendship in Denkyira, where Okomfo Anokye was said to have been one of the priests at court. It was in Akwamu, however, that their friendship deepened. They came to see how their qualities and character were complementary. Okomfo Anokye had no political power, so he was in no position to translate his brilliant ideas into action without the help of the young future ruler of the Asante state. The bold young Osei Tutu wisely realized that the help of the priest would be an asset in his future career as ruler.

To understand the importance of Okomfo Anokye's work one must first know something about the relationship between rulers and priests in Akan society. To the Akan life is a continuous existence. The dead live in a different world but continue to show interest in the affairs of the living. In fact the state was considered to be sacred as it was part of a world inhabited by human beings, spirits and gods. Human beings were expected to discharge their duties to the gods by performing certain rites. While the kings and chiefs were expected to discharge political duties and to regulate the relationship between the living and the ancestors, it was usually the priests who undertook to interpret the will of the gods. In every Akan state, therefore, each stool has a special god, who is supposed to guide the rulers and provide the moral checks and balances necessary for the smooth running of society. Mention has already been made of Adanse Bona. Denkyira had Yentumi and other protective deities. The priests, then, provided, in many cases, much of the moral fabric of society. In addition to the services of national gods, those of other famous priests and deities outside a state could always be sought. Side by side with the priests of national gods, there were people who were known to have been endowed with supernatural powers, but were not necessarily priests of any special gods. It appears that Okomfo Anokye was in the latter group.

By the end of the seventeenth century Okomfo Anokye's fame had travelled far and wide. Tales of a wonder-working priest reached the coast at this time, and it is highly probable that these were accounts of Okomfo Anokye's deeds. Bosman, the Dutch trading agent, who stayed in Ghana between 1689 and 1701, wrote of the miracles performed by the priest. It was claimed among other things that he was living in a

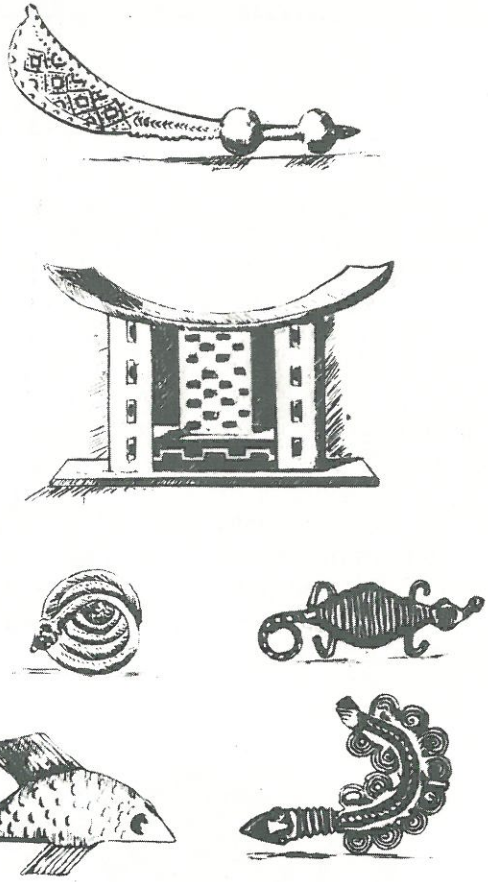
house without a roof, and yet he was always sheltered from rain. Bosman commented that 'the priest was incredibly respected and esteemed by his countrymen who looked upon him as a sort of demi-god'. Even now the traditions of Asante tell of the magical powers of Okomfo Anokye. Perhaps his most renowned and certainly most lasting political achievement was the creation of the Golden Stool, and the Okomfo Anokye



*7 Some gold weights. Gold dust was important for Akan trade for which these gold weights were designed. We do not know the weight of gold dust which would fill the basin sent by the Denkyira here.*

Sword, which is still stuck in the ground at Bantama in Kumasi.

It was primarily the threat of Denkyira which enabled Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye to rally all the other outlying states under one leadership. Tradition has it that in about 1698 Ntim Gyakari, the Denkyirahene, who had succeeded Boa Amponsem in 1692, sent a large brass basin to Asante, and demanded that it should be filled with gold dust and that the chiefs of Asante should each send him a wife from among their own wives. The chiefs refused to do this. This led the Denkyirahene to declare war on his vassals. Before the war Okomfo Anokye undertook to unite all the Asante chiefs to assure them of victory. It is said that on one Friday, at a great gathering of the various independent chiefs, Okomfo Anokye caused a stool to descend from the clouds and rest on the lap of Osei Tutu. Thereafter, all the assembled chiefs were asked to provide cuttings from their nails to be made into 'medicine' for the consecration of the stool. The stool became known as the *Sika Dwa Kofi*, the Golden Stool, whose day of birth is Friday. Okomfo Anokye presented it to the chiefs as the soul of the Asante nation, and granted its custody to Osei Tutu and his successors.

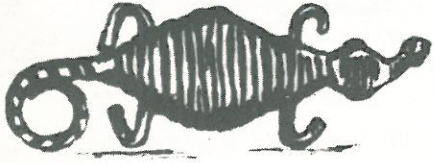


*8 An Asante state sword, stool and bronze weights to weigh gold dust.*

At Bantama in Kumasi, where the ceremony took place, Okomfo Anokye is said to have ritually buried all the stools that existed before the Golden Stool. This was because it was considered improper for any stool to take precedence over the Golden Stool. Thus, the creation of the Golden Stool saw the start of a new era. It marked the beginning of a new nation. The Golden Stool has remained the most important object in Asante, to which virtually all events in Asante are related.

Stripped of all the magic surrounding its origins, the historical meaning of the Golden Stool is simple and clear. By creating a new stool, which was completely different from the other traditional stools, a stool which was golden, instead of the usual black, Osei Tutu achieved something new. Whoever occupied it was indeed occupying a new position, which was psychologically superior to the others, since gold was the highest-prized metal of the Akans. The Golden Stool became the visible symbol of unity. It was henceforth to serve as the source of inspiration to all the chiefs. The Asantes would not only fight to preserve individual stools, but they would first of all defend this special stool, which was the soul of the nation. The creation of the Golden Stool was thus a great political achievement.

It is interesting to note that before the creation of the Golden Stool, Osei Tutu had also founded a new capital, which was to serve the young nation. The capital was moved from Kwaman to Kumasi. This strategically well-placed town, surrounded by hills and marshes, now became the capital of the new Asante nation. With unity now achieved, Osei Tutu turned his attention to the reorganization of the Asante army.



# 5
# The Asante War of Independence

*Korobea Yirefi Anwoma Sante Kotoko*
*Yerebebo wo din a, yema wo tuo ne afena*
*Okatakyie ofua tuo ne afena beko*
*Kaa wo nko a kampese yereko*
*Wofiri Kotoko, wowie kotoko.*

Korobea Yirefi Anwoma Sante Kotoko
When we are about to mention your name
We give you a gun and a sword
You are the valiant man that fights with gun and sword.
If you were to decide, you would decide for war
You hail from Kotoko, you are truly Kotoko.

Militarily, Osei Tutu had carried out reforms in the Kwaman state, which he inherited from Obiri Yeboa, by creating eight divisions in the army: Kontri, Akwamu, Nifa, Benkum, Kyidom, Adonten, Gyaase, and Oyoko. The Akwamu division was made up of the contingent which the king of Akwamu, Ansa Sasaraku, had given to escort him to Kumasi. This group stayed and helped in the reorganization of the Asante army. The Oyoko division on the other hand was made up of members of the clan to which the king belonged.

All the Amantoo* states that had joined the union also took up this system of organization, except that the Oyoko division was confined only to Kumasi. But for defensive purposes the new nation was divided into five larger units – Adonten, Kyidom, Benkum, Nifa, and Gyaase. Each of these, except the Gyaase, which formed the bodyguard of the king, was under the command of an Omanhene, head of one of the Amantoo. The Mamponhene, who was the second-in-command in Asante, became the Nifahene (head of the right wing); the Esumengyahene commanded the Benkum (left) division; and the Adontenhene of Kumasi, who held the rank of Omanhene, commanded the Adonten (vanguard) division of the whole Asante army. When the Asantehene himself did not go to war it was the next in command, the Mamponhene, who became the commander-in-chief. Other chiefs were assigned positions in these divisions. And so in wartime they assumed a role subordinate to the military heads.

The battle formation of the Asante, as has been rightly described by William Abraham:

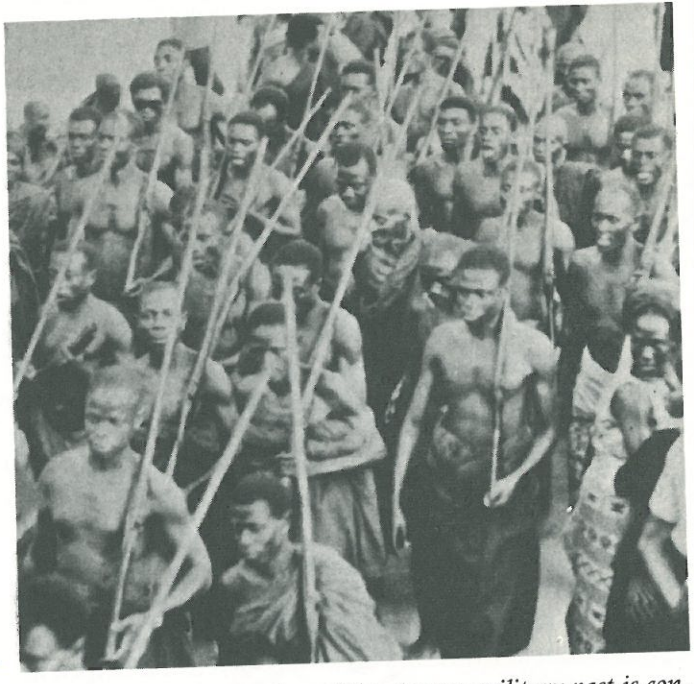
resembled an aeroplane. There was a central and pro-

*Amantoo refers to the original founding states of the Asante nation.

longed column headed by the scouts, immediately followed by the advanced guard. Behind this, the main body followed. Then came the commander-in-chief with his own warriors and aides-de-camp. In the rear and facing the opposite direction was the rear-guard (Kyidom). There were then two wings formed by ten columns, five on each side. Each division had its own military doctors.

It is not known whether all these developments had come into being by the time of Osei Tutu. What is certain, however, is that he was responsible for creating the rudiments of this organization. According to tradition, the Asante military organization was a perfection of the Denkyira and Akwamu systems, both of which were very familiar to Osei Tutu. The Akwamu contingent which followed Osei Tutu to Kumasi was given a prominent role in the new organization. The Akwamuhene became the second-in-command of the Kumasi army. Like all other armies of the Akans, the Asantes did not create a standing army. All able-bodied male citizens were potential soldiers and could be called upon in times of need.

In spite of the reorganization of the army and the unifying force which the Golden Stool provided, Osei Tutu



*9 All that now remains of the Asante military past is connected with ceremonial occasions. Asante warriors with Dane guns during a recent ceremony in Kumasi in 1970.*

*ıst is con-*
*ıith Dane*

viewed the war with Denkyira as a matter of life and death. He therefore employed all diplomacy at his disposal to ensure victory. A defeat by the all-powerful Denkyira forces would have destroyed his dream of creating a new, independent nation. Fortunately for Asante, Denkyira had succeeded in displeasing all the many states over which it exercised control. Bosman, the Dutch trading agent at the coast, reported that all these states were patiently awaiting a leader to lead them into a revolt. It was this feeling of discontent that Osei Tutu cleverly exploited. It is significant that almost all these states subject to Denkyira refused to fight on behalf of Denkyira. Indeed some were said to have supplied firearms to Asante, or allowed the Asantes easy passage through their territories to the coast, where they could buy guns and munitions. At the same time, they did everything to place difficulties in the way of Denkyira traders going to the coast. It is likely that Osei Tutu's stay at Denkyira enabled him to make the acquaintance of many of those who ruled the states subject to Denkyira. These contacts he put to good use in the interests of the Asante nation.

The behaviour of Ntim Gyakari of Denkyira did not endear him even to some of the Denkyira captains themselves. In 1692, young Ntim Gyakari, who according to some traditions was the issue of Osei Tutu's relationship with Bensua, had succeeded his maternal uncle Boa Amponsem. Relying on the glory of Denkyira, and careless of his own safety, he ignored the intensive preparations which were openly being made by Osei Tutu to assert the independence of his state. In fact it is said that Ntim Gyakari even refused to send all his fighting force against Asante. Towards the end of 1699 Denkyira set out to punish the rebellious Asantes. The Denkyirahene's contempt for Asante power was illustrated by his lack of concern even on the field of battle. Tradition has it that in the heat of battle Ntim Gyakari was found playing his golden *oware** with one of his favourite wives. No wonder, then, that at Feyiase Denkyira met its doom. The Denkyira army was defeated. Ntim Gyakari was captured and beheaded. With his death, the large empire which had been established by his predecessors virtually fell apart. The Asantes marched on Denkyira and took the capital, Abankesieso. It is said that it took the Asantes over ten days to gather together all the gold and other valuables of the Denkyira. The battle of Feyiase is one

*Oware is a game for two players using as apparatus forty-eight pebbles and a board hollowed out into two parallel rows of six.

of the most remembered in Akan tradition. It marked the end of one of the most renowned and wealthy Akan states. It paved the way for the period of Asante rule, which lasted until 1900, when it was laid low by Britain. Ntim Gyakari's capture and death, his wealth and power, are still remembered in the famous dirge:

> Ntim Gyakari, the wealthy noble,
> Who took his nation to its doom at Feyiase,
> Grandsire of Ntim Gyakari comes from Feyiase,
> the Field of Battle.

The defeat of Denkyira enabled the Asantes to trade directly with the Europeans at the coast, although there were still wars to be fought to establish Asante rule over all the states formerly ruled by Denkyira, as well as other states. It was enough to announce Osei Tutu's fame and power throughout the length and breadth of Ghana. Even before the victorious Asantes had finished their mopping-up operations in the Denkyira capital, the shrewd Dutch traders on the coast had sent up a trade consul, David van Nyendael, to the court of the king whom they described as 'fearful'. The Dutch action was clear evidence of the respect which was to be accorded to Osei Tutu's new nation. From 1701, Kumasi, the

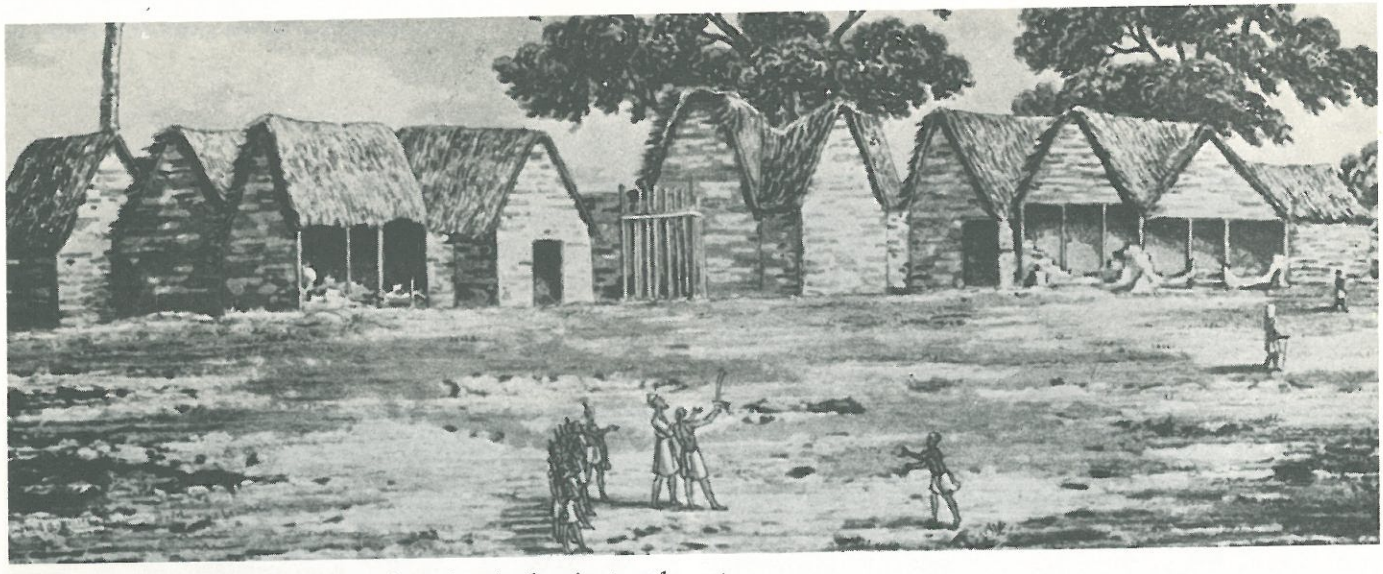
*10 Although this was a nineteenth-century reception for a foreign dignitary it may bear some resemblance to the State reception of van Nyendael.*

on for a
he State

Asante capital, became the destination of several European delegations bringing presents for the king. Both the Dutch and the English competed for the king's favours. The latter group in particular were much impressed by the Asantehene's sense of dignity. He was described as the only king who not only received, but regularly reciprocated, whatever presents were sent him. He was known to return 'a dash for a dash'. In 1706 an Englishman wrote that: 'The trade with Asante was so important and the king's friendship so valuable that they [the English] could never be generous with him,' and so requested several presents for the king.

In their struggle for favours it was the Dutch who gained most from the Asante-Denkyira war. It enabled them to establish friendly relations with Asante which were to last well into the nineteenth century. It is said that the Dutch used to pay regular amounts of money to Denkyira, since the Denkyirahene claimed to be the overlord of the land on which Elmina Castle stood. On the defeat of Denkyira, the Dutch transferred payment to Asante. This arrangement was said to have been embodied in a contract often referred to as the Elmina Note. The origins of the Elmina Note are obscure. Some historians say that it dates back to the Portuguese. According to this story, these first entered into treaty relations with the king of Eguafo, who granted them permission to erect a castle on his land, and received regular payments as ground-rent. Later on the 'Elmina Note' fell into the hands of Denkyira. On the strength of it they received regular payments from the Dutch, who had taken control of the Portuguese castle in 1637. When

*11 In Osei Tutu's day, the Asantehene went to war. In this picture the present Asantehene is in his Batakarikesee or Great War Dress which reminds Asantes today of their past warrior kings. (Kumasi, 1970.)*



*12 A street in Kumasi leading to the Palace in the nineteenth century.*

Osei Tutu defeated Denkyira he also gained control over the Elmina Note and thereby collected the ground-rent for Elmina Castle from the Dutch.

It seems, however, that the origins of the Dutch-Asante alliance must really be looked for in events which happened after the Asante-Denkyira war. It is highly probable that the Elmina Note was negotiated during van Nyendael's stay in Asante and was not captured from the Denkyiras. But whatever the origins of the Note it gave the Asantes several advantages. They gained the friendship of the Dutch and the Elmina people: not long afterwards the Asantes came to describe themselves as blood relations of the Elmina. In the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Elmina became a faithful ally of the Asantes in their drive to the coast. In the nineteenth century the Asantehene Kofi Karikari claimed that his great-grandfather received 'the Book' from Denkyira and the ground rental of Elmina Castle from the Dutch. This was in reference to the exploits of Osei Tutu.

# 6
# Osei Tutu the Law-giver

*Okumase Adu Ampoforo Antwihene See Tutu e!*
*Osei Tutu*
*Yebo wo din a, yento wo so.*
*Osei Tutu*
*Yebo wo din a, yento wo so. Okesee.*

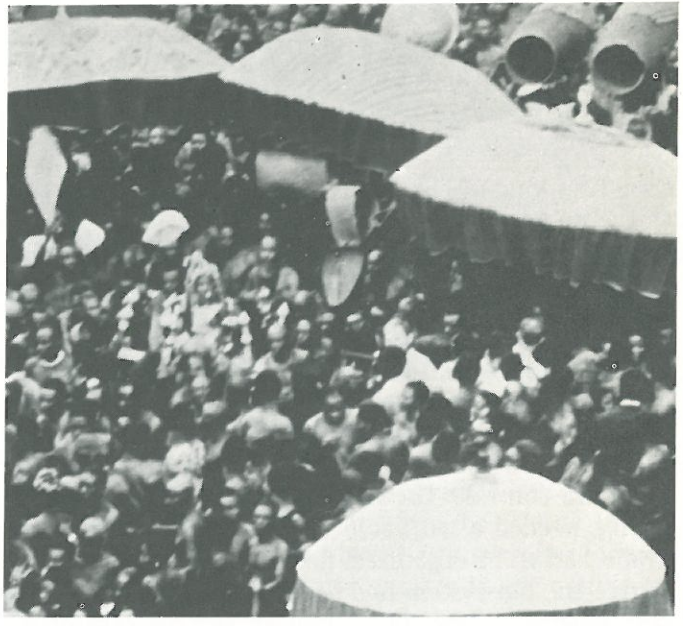
Osei Tutu king of Kumasi Adu Ampoforo Antwi
Osei Tutu
When we mention your name we do not take it in vain
When we mention your name we do not take it in vain,
Great One.

With the threat of Denkyira virtually removed by the battle of Feyiase, it remained to be seen whether the new nation could endure. Did the people come together only because of the common desire to rid themselves of Denkyira control? The new nation, in order to hold together, needed a workable and acceptable constitution. Trade had to be organized, taxes collected. However effective the old system had been, it was now imperative that new posts should be created to take care of the affairs of a united nation. In addition to his bravery, Osei Tutu is still remembered as the great law-giver: in fact people tend to attribute all Asante laws to Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye. This is understandable, because with few modifications the Asante constitution has continued to be basically that given to the nation by its founder.

The Asante constitution was essentially federal. At the head of the nation was the king, the Asantehene, who at the same time was the paramount chief, Omanhene, of the Kumasi division. Then came the Abrempon or Amanhene of the Amantoo. In the day-to-day administration of their states each Omanhene was independent of the other, although judicial appeal lay with the Asantehene's court at Kumasi. In the distribution of power, Osei Tutu's wisdom stands out clearly. If all the original states of the confederation had been of the Oyoko clan, they would probably all have agreed to come under the Oyoko of Kumasi. But this was not the case. Mampon belonged to the Bretuo clan. To placate the Mamponhene, he was made the first of the Abrempon. He was said to be occupying a silver stool instead of a golden one. According to Asante tradition the Mamponhene carries the legs while the Asantehene holds the head of the nation.

In foreign affairs, especially in the declaration of war and peace, the Asantehene acted on the advice of the Abrempon. For military purposes each Obrempon con-

tributed soldiers for national wars. As has been pointed out, each chief knew exactly in which division he fought and what contingent he commanded. Financially each component state had power over its finances, but was expected to pay the *Apeato*, the war tax, and all extraordinary taxes. The highest legislative body was the Asanteman Council, a sort of privy council composed of the Amanhene and presided over by the Asantehene. This met at irregular intervals. For the day-to-day administration each Obrempon had his own council. For matters affecting the confederacy, there was an inner council, the Kotoko Council, which was composed of the Asantehene, a few Abrempon and some members of the Kumasi Council. To facilitate matters for the far-flung nation there was also instituted in Kumasi a system known as *Adamfo*, friend. Each Obrempon had one of the Kumasi chiefs as his Adamfo, in whose house he normally stayed and with whom he usually went to see the Asantehene. It was also through the Adamfo that the Asantehene passed all messages meant for a particular Obrempon. The Adamfo system helped to keep the outlying provinces informed of what was going on in the capital. Under the constitution, all the Abrempon swore the oath of allegiance at the time of installation

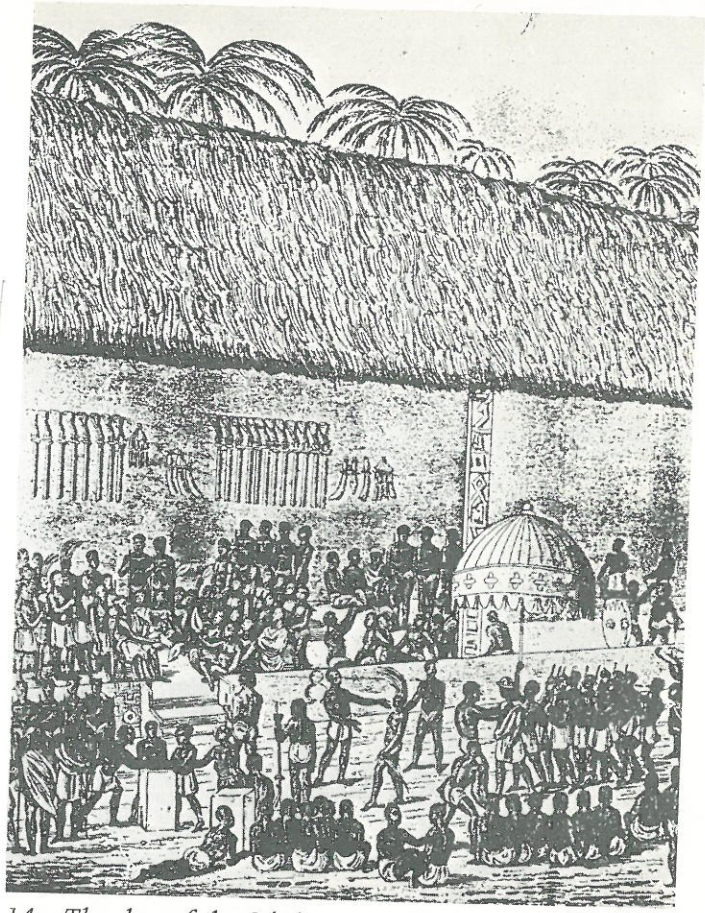


*13 In this photograph taken in 1970, of the Durbar of an Asante chief, (the enthronement of Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, the Asantehene), the chiefs can be distinguished by the traditional umbrellas which they carry – an emblem of nobility.*

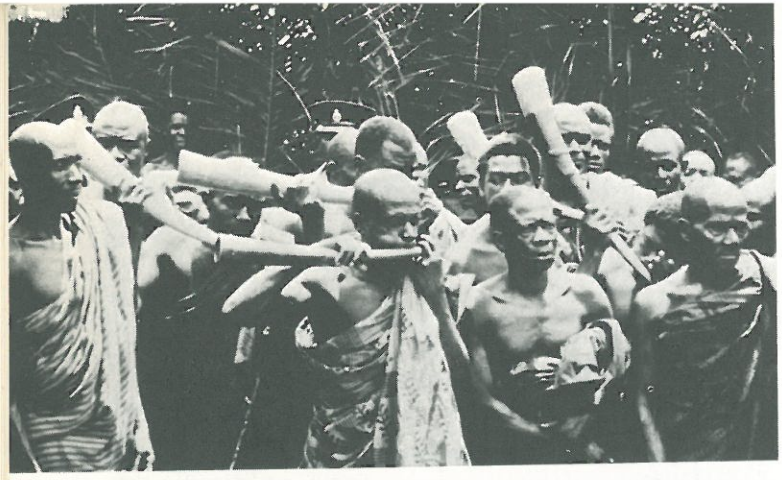
*of an re II, tradi- bility.*

to the occupant of the Golden Stool. In his own state or *Oman*, the Obrempon had his own court, and institutions similar to those at Kumasi but on a minor scale. His sub-chiefs also swore the oath of allegiance to him, paid emergency taxes and allowed appeals from their courts to his council.

An interesting device which was introduced by Osei Tutu was the annual Odwira festival. The Odwira festival is celebrated by all the Akans to honour and propitiate their dead kings and ancestors, and also to cleanse the nation from all past evils. Osei Tutu decreed that all the Abrempon should join him in Kumasi to celebrate the annual event. It had a social and religious, as well as a political significance. Politically, it enabled the chiefs and the people to renew their allegiance to the occupant of the Golden Stool and to rededicate themselves to the welfare of the nation. It served as an occasion for settling internal disputes. Chiefs who failed to attend the celebration had to show cause why. At least during the celebration, all the chiefs became aware of those who were plotting against the state by their absence. To ensure the success of his policy of assimilation Osei Tutu decreed that no one should point to or make public the ancestry of another person. Defeated chiefs and im-



*14 The close of the Odwira ceremony in the nineteenth century.*

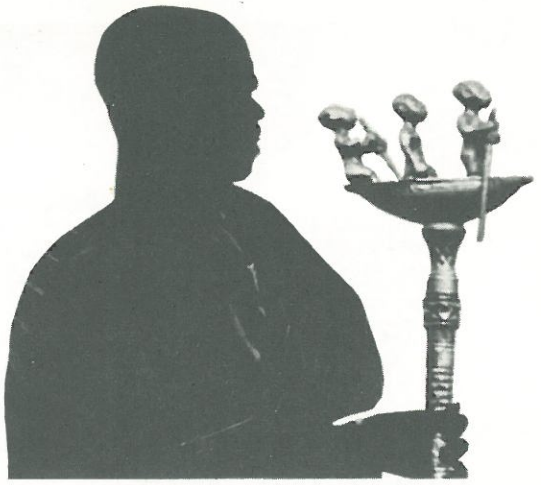


*15 Apart from the stools, there were other emblems of royalty. These state horns made of elephant tusks were used during royal processions. (Kumasi, 1970.)*

portant members of their clan were expected to come regularly to Kumasi, and also to send hostages to the king's court. This was to instil in them respect and affection for Asante institutions, to teach them the history of the nation, and to help all to take pride in the achievements of Asante.

The problem of instituting administrative reforms that would suit an expanding nation was also vigorously tackled by Osei Tutu. Although the Golden Stool had been accepted by all, the King realized that it would be politically unwise and dangerous to depend solely on the Abrempon for military contingents. How could the king ensure that these Abrempon, who were independent in their own right and who had gained their land by their own efforts, would be loyal at all times? What if these chiefs decide to band together against the occupant of the Golden Stool? It was the need to solve this problem that influenced Osei Tutu's appointment of members of the Kumasi division to govern the newly conquered land. They could use their own fighting force to support the centre and therefore to offset any threat from the Abrempon. In addition, Osei Tutu carried on some administrative reforms at court which aimed at efficiency

*16 State horns made of elephant tusks. (Kumasi, 1970.)*



17 *There were probably staffs of office like this — linguists' staffs with gold overlay. (Kumasi, 1970.)*

and loyalty on the part of court officials. He wanted to create positions which could be filled by people with no claim to any traditional privileges. And in assigning these newly created administrative heads to his military organization he kept a sharp eye on the balance of power. Here, a distinction must be made between the two different types of stools that are occupied by Akan chiefs. First, there are traditional ancestral stools known as *Agudee*: these are the stools of chiefs who joined the confederacy at its very beginning. The Agudee stools are not made but handed down by the ancestors. Succession to these stools is matrilineal. In addition there are the *Abodie*. These may be classified into two groups. *Mma-mma Dwa* are stools created for the nobility, sons and grandsons of the kings. Appointments to these stools are made by the king and succession is patrilineal. The second group is that of the Service stools. The king has the right to appoint any of his faithful attendants in the Gyaase division to occupy these. By this means, faithful service is well rewarded. In the creation of these stools Osei Tutu showed the way for future rulers. During his reign he is said to have created thirty-one stools. Of these as many as twenty were grouped under the Gyaasehene, who was the head of the king's household. The titles of some of the stools created show the keen interest the king took in trade, guilds and finance. The *Sannaahene* was the king's treasurer; the guilds were headed by the *Adwumfohene*; while trade was under the care of the *Asokwa Batahene*. The holders of these posts were like ministers, who were in charge of the growing body bureaucrats, a kind of civil service. The Asante bureaucracy, which was started by Osei Tutu, was improved upon by his successors in later years. By his policy of accommodation and assimilation, Osei Tutu underlined the practice whereby merit and faithful service came to be rewarded. This was used to counteract the influence of the traditional aristocracy. He started building a nation in which all members would be interested in giving of their best since 'high office was available to commoners

*18 Linguists' staffs with gold overlay. (Kumasi, 1970.)*

as well as nobles'. Later rulers were to go even further to make high office available to Asantes as well as non-Asantes. From the very beginning of the Asante nation, political power came to be shared not only by people born into particular clans but even by slaves who were competent and faithful to the ideals of the nation.

# 7
# Osei Tutu and his Neighbours

*Asante Kotoko*
*Kum apem, apem beba.*

Asante, the Porcupine
If a thousand were killed
A thousand would replace them.

From 1700 the Asante nation became the most important single state in Ghana. In fact it may be said that the history of Ghana (the Gold Coast) from that time became the history of the relations between Asante and its neighbours. The new nation adopted the porcupine as its national emblem. This was significant. It was indicative of the Asante spirit. It proclaimed that the new nation, like the porcupine, would be normally peace-loving, but dangerous if aroused; for it was 'endowed with hosts of quills all united in a common purpose in a common centre'. The king's talking drums openly spread the message of ever-ready Asante Kotoko, which was prepared for peace or war. By the end of Osei Tutu's reign in 1717, Asante had embarked on a successful war of conquest and had established itself firmly along the northern and south-western trade routes.

By 1716 it had overrun the old Wenchi capital of Ahwene Koko. Tradition has it that some of the Asante soldiers defected with their booty to Awowin. Headed by the redoubtable general Amankwatia Panin, the Bantamahene, and the first Krontihene of Kumasi, the Asantes drove all before them. They first defeated the Sefwis, and by 1715 the Awowins. In that year Amankwatia's forces pushed southwards, defeated the Nzema and took Apolonia. For the first time in Asante history, the Asante army gazed on the sea. It remained to be seen whether they would seek to control all the coastal states. Before the Awowin campaign Asante had defeated a joint Akyem and Denkyira attempt to recapture former glory, and had also subjugated Wassa. But Akyem remained restless and continued to harass the Asantes.

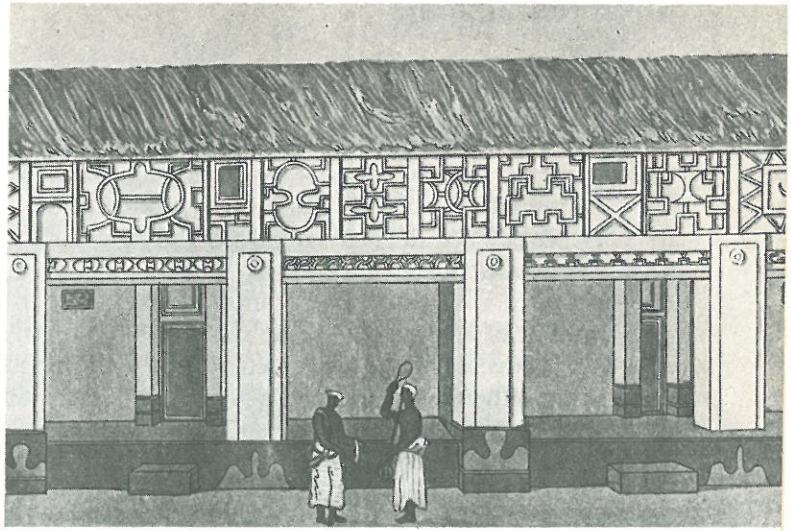
Akyem resentment of Asante power was to be traced to the Asante-Akwamu friendship which was initiated during Osei Tutu's stay in Akwamu. Akyem was the traditional enemy of Akwamu, and saw in the alliance further threats to its well-being and safety. For a long time it had been the policy of Akwamu to prevent the Akyems from gaining any direct access to the coast. This they were able to do by defeating the Agona and Accra chiefs, and thereby sealing off their approach to the

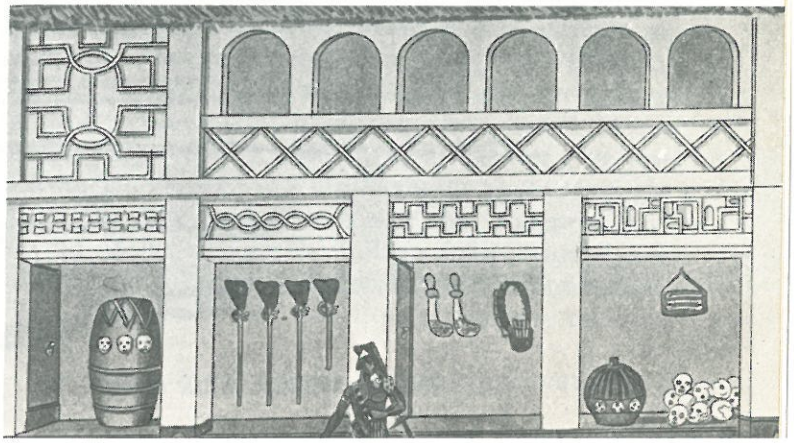
*Map 4 Asante-sphere of influence and direction of expansion after 1702.*

European traders. Akyem traders wishing to come to Accra had to do so through Akwamu middlemen. In fact it was at the inland market at Abonse, just a few miles north of Accra in Akwapim, that Akyem and other inland traders had to dispose of their goods to Akwamu merchants. The Akyems rightly realized that an alliance between Asante and Akwamu would work against their interests, and did all they could to prevent it. It is significant to note that of all the other independent states it was only Akyem that fought on the side of Denkyira against Asante in 1701. The position of the Abuakwahene of modern Denkyira is a clear survival of this alliance. On the other hand, as pointed out elsewhere, the Akwamu saw in the rising Asante an ally that would keep the Akyem busily watching and defending their northern borders. That would give Akwamu ample freedom to pursue its territorial ambitions in the states east of the Volta. When Akwamu-Asante relations became strained in 1717 the Akyems were able to inflict a national disaster on the Asantes.

Osei Tutu realized that the safety of his nation depended among other things on the free flow of trade goods, especially firearms, from the coast. He therefore sought not only the friendship of the European traders but that of the successful African middlemen and merchant princes on the coast. Men like John Kabes of Komenda and John Konny of Ahanta were known to have been on good terms with the Asantehene. Both of them became agents for Asante traders and sold goods to the Asantes and other inland traders at a price considerably less than

19 *Part of the Palace in Asante in the nineteenth century.*



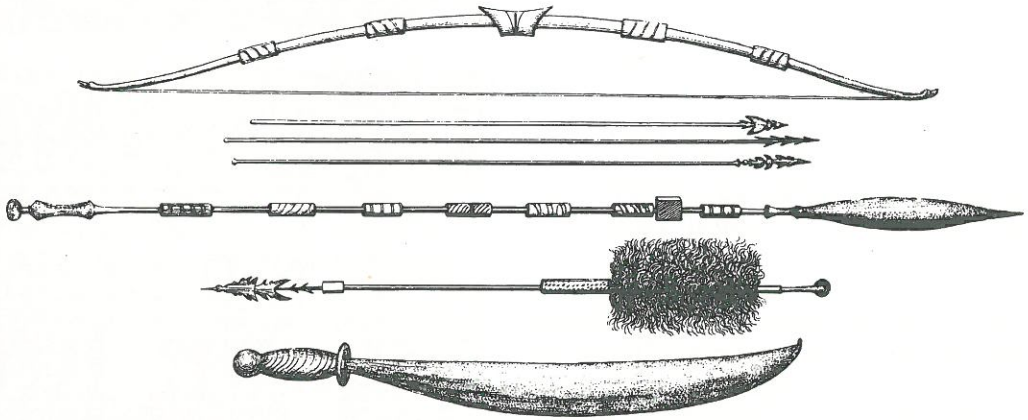


those obtained from the European forts. At Komenda, for instance, there lived the Asantehene's representative, one Antebene, who was charged among other things with the duty of ensuring easy passage for Asante traders. In 1715, Antebene was directed by Osei Tutu to settle a dispute between Kabes and Twifo which was adversely affecting Asante trade to the coast. And for these good offices Osei Tutu was given part of the arbitration fee to show that the dispute had been settled. John Kabes was also known to have exchanged a number of presents with the Asantehene. In the same year, 1715, the Asante general, Amankwatia, also settled a similar dispute between John Konny and Pinga, a Nzema chief. The friendship between the Asante court and Konny continued after the death of Osei Tutu. John Konny sent masons and other craftsmen to Opoku Ware in 1723 to help in building a new palace. When Konny fell in 1724, it was in Kumasi that he sought help to retrieve his fortune.

In spite of their two defeats in war the Akyem refused to submit to Asante rule. By 1715 it had become apparent that the two sides would soon go to war again. The Akyems were openly hostile to Asante traders passing through their country to the coast. Dutch and English

trading agents saw the signs of war preparations in the great demand for firearms by Asante and Akyem traders. In 1717, Osei Tutu decided to punish the Akyems for their hostile attitude. Unfortunately for Asante, Akwamu had been displeased by Asante support and encouragement of Agona, its subject state. The Akwamus as an act of revenge revealed the Asante line of march to the Akyem. When Osei Tutu was crossing the Pra he was ambushed and killed by the Akyems. So ended the life of the founder of the Asante nation. The disaster which befell the Asante army on that Saturday on the Pra is still well remembered in the Asante national oath, *Komante Memeneda.* The death of the king demoralized the Asante army. It also created troubles at home. Any state with a weak foundation would have collapsed.

Between 1717 and 1720, civil war raged in Kumasi. For some of the conquered states, such as Awowin and Assin, it was an occasion to throw off Asante overlordship. Luckily for the Asante nation, Opoku Ware, the successor to Osei Tutu, was soon able to bring matters



*20 Military weapons of the Asante.*

under control and to build upon the foundations which had been erected by his uncle. By the time of Osei Tutu's death the Asante had embarked on the building of a powerful empire. It had gained control over the trade routes through the north-west to the Mande trading town of Begho, and north-east to Gonja. It had carried its victorious arms through Sehwi, Wassa, Awowin and Nzema, and to the coast to Apolonia (Benyin). Denkyira, the once powerful state, 'the slayer of mighty elephants', had been brought under Asante rule. The king had established friendship between Elmina and Akwamu, which in spite of its temporary setback in 1717 was to continue well into the nineteenth century. On the coast Osei Tutu's name had become a byword not only with the European traders, but with the important African merchant princes through whose help he was able to secure a regular and constant supply of firearms. In 1690, as the Dutch trader Bosman pointed out, Asante was virtually unknown. By 1701, it had become the most powerful state in the Gold Coast. David van Nyendael's stay at Osei Tutu's court for over a year was a clear testimony to the power, wealth and prestige that Asante had come to enjoy. Kumasi, the new capital he built, became the centre of all activities. To supply this capital, Osei Tutu made it a policy to settle craftsmen from all the defeated states within its immediate neighbourhood. Weavers, blacksmiths and goldsmiths from Denkyira, Sehwi, Wassa and other places were settled in such towns as Ahwiaa, Ntonso, Kentenkrono, Pankrono and Fumesua while trade from the defeated area began to be re-routed through Kumasi.

At home the king had pursued a wise policy of assimilation and administrative centralization. Quickly realizing the importance of trade to the growth of his state, he had created offices to take care of commerce. Working in close harmony with his priest-friend, Okomfo Anokye, Osei Tutu was able to provide an acceptable and respectable national symbol. The creation of the Golden Stool was by all standards a brilliant political achievement. It satisfied the religious beliefs of his people and it gave them a concrete object to defend. That Friday on which Okomfo Anokye brought down the *Sika Dwa Kofi* became the 'Founders Day' for the Asante nation. The Golden Stool incident gave all the Asantes a time and place to which all subsequent events could be related and from which they could be dated.

Osei Tutu's far-sightedness and the sound foundations

which he laid allowed Opoku Ware *Katakyie*, 'the brave one', who succeeded him in 1720, to extend Asante rule. He brought the ancient Akan kingdom of Bono-Takyiman and Gyaman under Asante and conquered the northern state of Gonja. To the south, he avenged the death of Osei Tutu and completely subdued the Akyems. Opoku Ware also ably carried on Osei Tutu's policy of administrative reform to enable the expanding frontiers to be properly governed.

If today the oral traditions of Asante tend to attribute everything of importance in its history to the reign of Osei Tutu, this is understandable, because all subsequent developments have been mere improvements on his achievements. To the Asantes, Osei Tutu deservedly earned the byname *Opimsuo*, 'he who strives'.

*21 No picture of Opoku Ware is available. This picture shows the present Asantehene who has adopted his title. He is Otumfuo Opoku Ware II. (Kumasi, 1970.)*

AFRICAN HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHIES

Edited by Obaro Ikime
*Professor of History, University of Ibadan and Co-editor of* Tarikh.

HEINEMANN
London · Ibadan · Nairobi · Lusaka

1. *Menelik of Ethiopia* by R. H. Kofi Darkwah
   Menelik defeated the Italians at the battle of Adowa in 1894 and thus preserved the independence of his Empire.

2. *Khama of Botswana* by Anthony J. Dachs
   Rhodes's British South Africa Company, the Boer republicans, and many other rapacious people wanted to exploit Khama's position.

3. *Nana of the Niger Delta* by Obaro Ikime
   British gunboats pushed this great merchant prince from his position as middleman in the palm oil trade on the Benin River.

4. *Moshweshwe of Lesotho* by Peter Sanders
   Moshweshwe held his mountain kingdom together against the pressures of the Zulus and the Boers.

5. *Obaseki of Benin* by Philip Aigbona Igbafe
   Agho Obaseki by force of personality rose to a position where he dominated Benin politics after the British expeditionary force had seized Benin.

6. *Osei Tutu of Asante* by K. Yeboa Daaku
   Osei Tutu is the best-remembered of all the Asante kings. At the beginning of the eighteenth century he made Asante the strongest of the forest states of West Africa.

7. *Herbert Macaulay: Nigerian Patriot* by Tekena N. Tamuno
   Although in 1893 he became the first Nigerian civil engineer, he had a far greater success as a political engineer. He took every chance in the courts and newspapers to fight the great causes of Lagos and the emerging Nigerian nation.

8. *Chief Dogho of Warri* by Obaro Ikime
   Dogho played an important part in the establishment of British rule over the western part of the Niger Delta in the 1890s.

9. *Naimbana of Sierra Leone* by Adeleye Ijagbemi
   Naimbana, Regent of the Koya Kingdom from 1775 to 1793, was visited by the founders of the Colony of Sierra Leone. He had become rich through slave trading but he co-operated with the strangers to put an end to the slave trade.

10. *King Boy of Brass* by E. J. Alagoa
    King Boy brought the English explorers, the Lander brothers, from Aboh to the Nun estuary in 1830. At last it became clear to the Europeans that the Oil Rivers formed the Delta of the Niger.

11. *Lobengula of Zimbabwe* by Ngwabi Bhebe
    Lobengula, despite considerable personal gifts, was never sufficiently autocratic to enable his people to resist Rhodes.

12. *Mirambo of Tanzania* by A. C. Unomah
    Mirambo, a great military ruler, established a powerful kingdom not in response to the European outsiders but to the situation in East Africa.

13. *Mzilikazi of the Ndebele* by R. Kent Rasmussen
    Mzilikazi broke from Chaka, clashed with the Boers, and founded the Ndebele state in the ruins of the